

told me he spent the last several weeks traveling across Central Illinois, visiting Muslim mosques and assuring them that they were still part of America and that they had the full protection of the law. Nevertheless, there has been a dramatic increase of anti-Muslim bigotry since 9/11. In fear and anger, some Americans have wrongly struck out at Muslims.

I had my differences with former President George W. Bush, but he showed real insight, wisdom, and leadership after 9/11 when he made it clear to America that our war was with terrorists who perverted the teachings of the Islamic religion, not with Muslims who were faithful to what he called “a faith based upon love, not hate.” Congress at that time spoke with a clear voice too. I cosponsored a resolution with John Sununu, a Republican from New Hampshire, who was then the only Arab American in the Senate. Our resolution condemned anti-Muslim, anti-Arab bigotry, and said that American Muslims are vibrant, peaceful, law-abiding, and greatly contribute to American society. That resolution passed both Chambers unanimously. I hope it would pass today.

Earlier this decade, we saw another wave of anti-Muslim rhetoric and discrimination. In 2011 I chaired the first ever congressional hearing on the civil rights of American Muslims. That hearing documented an alarming increase of anti-Muslim bigotry. At the time, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission found that Muslims accounted for approximately 25 percent of religious discrimination cases, although they were less than 1 percent of the population. Mary Jo O'Neill of the EEOC said:

There's a level of hatred and animosity that is shocking. I've been doing this for 31 years, and I've never seen such antipathy towards Muslim workers.

Unfortunately, we are again experiencing an increase in anti-Muslim discrimination. Last week Oren Segal of the Anti-Defamation League said, “We're definitely seeing anti-Muslim bigotry escalating around the country.”

In recent weeks vandals defaced a mosque near Austin, TX; a pig's head was thrown on the doorstep of a Philadelphia mosque; a man was arrested for breaking into a Florida mosque and damaging property; a sixth grade girl in New York City was allegedly called “ISIS” as a group of boys punched her and tried to remove her hijab; and on Thanksgiving day a Muslim cabdriver from Pittsburgh was shot in the back by a passenger who reportedly asked the driver about ISIS and whether he was a “Pakistani guy.”

Just this weekend a man in California was arrested and charged for a hate crime and arson after allegedly setting a fire in a mosque.

Last week Representative ANDRÉ CARSON—a Democrat from Indiana and one of the two American Muslims who serve in the U.S. Congress—received a

death threat. Here is what Congressman CARSON said:

You have other politicians who are joining the bandwagon and who are fanning the flames of bigotry. That concerns me because we're putting people into the line of fire exposing them to death threats, discrimination at the workplace and assaults.

These incidents of intimidation, hostility, and violence impact the entire Muslim American community. They also play into our enemies' warped views of the United States. Director Comey of the FBI noted last week that “the notion that the U.S. is anti-Muslim is part of ISIL's narrative and Al Qaeda's narrative.”

It is important to note that not only Muslim Americans are being targeted. Bigots have also targeted Arab Americans, many of whom are Christian, and Hindus, and Sikhs. After 9/11, the first victim killed in the backlash was Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh American, in Mesa, AZ. I submitted a resolution, which passed the Senate unanimously, condemning bigotry against Sikh Americans.

In 2012, a White supremacist murdered six Sikhs at a gurdwara in Oak Creek, WI. Following this terrorist attack, I chaired a hearing on hate crimes and the threat of domestic extremism where we learned that the FBI wasn't even tracking these crimes against Arab Americans, Hindu Americans, and Sikh Americans. I asked the FBI to change the policy, and they did. Clearly there is more work to be done.

Last week, a vandal spray-painted anti-Muslim graffiti on a Sikh gurdwara in Buena Park, CA. In September, a Sikh man in my home State of Illinois suffered a fractured cheekbone after he was allegedly assaulted by a man who yelled “terrorist” and “go back to your country” at him.

As we work to combat terrorism, we must also work to prevent and punish discrimination and hate-fueled violence against Muslim Americans. The rights of Muslim Americans are just as important as the rights of Christians, Jews, followers of other faiths, and nonbelievers as well.

We know the First Amendment protects both the free exercise of religion and the freedom of speech. But all of us, especially those of us in public life, have a responsibility to choose our words carefully. We must condemn bias and bigotry aimed at Muslim Americans and make it clear that we will not tolerate religious discrimination in the United States of America. We can protect our Nation and still be true to the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by our Constitution.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Will the Senator withhold that suggestion?

Mr. DURBIN. Yes.

NOMINATION RETURNED TO THE EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The papers with respect to Presidential Nomi-

nation No. 742 having been returned from the White House, the nomination will be returned to the Calendar, pursuant to the order of November 30, 2015.

Mr. DURBIN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REED. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. AYOTTE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nominations of Alissa M. Starzak, of New York, to be General Counsel of the Department of the Army; John Conger, of Maryland, to be a Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense; Stephen P. Welby, of Maryland, to be an Assistant Secretary of Defense; and Franklin R. Parker, of Illinois, to be an Assistant Secretary of the Navy.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be 30 minutes for debate equally divided in the usual form.

The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Madam President, will the Presiding Officer inform me when I have used 7 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator will be notified when his time has expired.

STARZAK NOMINATION

Mr. REED. Mr. President, these are all able and capable individuals who have been nominated and approved by the Senate Armed Services Committee. I want to pay particular attention to the nomination of Alissa Starzak to be general counsel of the Department of the Army. I have had the pleasure of working with Ms. Starzak for several years in her current capacity as the deputy general counsel of the Department of Defense. She has done an extraordinary job. I am confident that her extensive legal experience in her current—as well as previous—position has prepared her well for the position for which she has been nominated.

Prior to her current position at the Department of Defense, Ms. Starzak worked at the CIA's Office of General Counsel and also served as counsel on the staff of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. I don't need to